

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Mrs Rosie Greenhalgh.

Today we continue our Lent worship series, Worship in the Wilderness, with 'A truth-Speaking Journey'. The outline for worship and much of the material has been prepared by Sam and Sara Hargreaves for Engage Worship as indicated. <sup>1</sup>

### Call to worship *Isaiah 40 vv 6-8* <sup>2</sup>

A voice says, 'Cry out.' And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

'All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them.

Surely the people are grass.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures for ever.'

### Hymn StF 186 <sup>3</sup> [To join in click here](#)

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|--|--|
| <p>1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!<br/>Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;<br/>tender to me the promise of his word;<br/>in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.</p>              | <p>3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!<br/>Powers and dominions lay their glory by;<br/>proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to<br/>flight,<br/>the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.</p> |
| <p>2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!<br/>Make known his might, the deeds his arm<br/>has done;<br/>his mercy sure, from age to age to same;<br/>his holy name - the Lord, the Mighty One.</p> | <p>4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!<br/>Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.<br/>Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord<br/>to children's children and for evermore!</p>             |
- Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)*

### Prayer of Adoration *using the hymn 'Every Promise', by Keith Getty & Stuart Townend* <sup>4</sup>

Lord God, I come to praise you this morning for all your goodness to me. I come rejoicing that I belong to you. You have cared for me from the moment I was conceived; you have travelled with me throughout my life, in good times and in bad. From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun, I will stand on every promise of your word. Words of power, strong to save, that will never pass away; I will stand on every promise of your word.

Lord Jesus, I praise you for all that you have achieved for humankind. You were there in the beginning, the mighty Word. Yet you laid your glory by, became flesh, and took on the nature of a servant. You became obedient to death – even death on a cross – that I might inherit eternal life. When I'm faced with anguished choice, I will listen for your voice, and I'll stand on every promise of your word. Through this dark and troubled land you will guide me with your hand as I stand on every promise of your word.

Holy Spirit, I praise you for living within me and making me more like Jesus my saviour. You bring hope that lifts me from despair, love that casts out every fear, as I stand on every promise of your word. Not forsaken, not alone, for the Comforter has come, and I stand on every promise of your word.

Praise be to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

### Prayer of Confession <sup>1</sup>

Father, when I come to you hungry, perhaps it's because I haven't fed properly from your word.

#### Word of God, feed me.

There are times when I lose my way; I feel I'm going round in circles, unsure of my next step.

#### Word of God, lead me.

When I'm stuck in repetitive habits, I know you have more for me than this mediocrity.

**Word of God, shake me.**

Parts of my heart are cold towards the world you love. Fill me with your compassion.

**Word of God, break me.**

"The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword."

**Feed me with your wisdom, lead me with your love, shake me with your reality,  
break me with your perspective and rebuild me with your Holy Spirit's power. Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Read: Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14** <sup>2</sup> [To listen click here](#) *The reading ends at 2 min 48*

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'Sovereign Lord, you alone know.'

Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."'

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." Therefore prophecy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"

**Poem: Those Dry Bones Get Everywhere** *by Dave Hopwood*<sup>1</sup> [For video version click here](#)

Those dry bones get everywhere.

In the workplaces and job centres, in the homes and high streets, in the schools and colleges.

Those dry bones get everywhere.

In the shops and sports arenas, in the places of entertainment and the centres of leisure.

Those dry bones get everywhere.

Sprinkling their lifeless dust, sapping energy and draining hope, confusing minds and sowing discontent.

Those dry bones get everywhere –

but so does the breath of God, and so does the hopeful life of the Spirit.

Gentle and powerful; rushing and meandering; transforming radically, and little by little;  
resurrecting, encouraging, stirring, comforting.

Those dry bones get everywhere - but so does the breath of God.

**Hymn** StF 161 <sup>5</sup> [To join in click here](#)

1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.
2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm  
has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;  
his holy name - the Lord, the Mighty One.
3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;  
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to  
flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.
4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!

*Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)*

**Prayer** <sup>1</sup>

Lord, we may come to you dry, discouraged, feeling frail or powerless;  
but we come believing that you have the words of eternal life.  
Speak to our dry bones; may your Word and your Spirit give us life,  
and empower us to speak truth into this world you love. Amen.

**Reflection** *based on material from Worship in the Wilderness* <sup>1</sup>

During this Lent series we have been thinking about wilderness experiences. After his baptism Jesus was alone in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights, trying to work out through prayer how his mission should be carried out. In this Covid crisis many of us have felt alone in a kind of desert, and perhaps we too have been seeking a way forward for our own mission.

After the Exodus from Egypt, the Children of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years. Like us over the last year, they had the sense that 'we are all in this together'; it helped unite them into one nation. Although they grumbled, and often doubted that God would provide for them, this was a defining time for God's people and a lasting demonstration of God's character. He dwelt among them; they were guided by pillars of cloud and fire. God's faithfulness towards them in the wilderness was a theme they returned to again and again; in times of crisis they remembered that desert experience and used it as a lens to see how God might act in their present trouble.

**1) Wilderness and exile**

The nadir of Israelite history came in 597BC, when Israel was taken into exile by Babylon. There could be no greater crisis than to be ripped out of the Promised Land, and 10 years later to see Jerusalem and its temple destroyed. Yet prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel tried to remind their distraught people that even in the wilderness of exile they could still rely on the God who had led them through the desert.

Ezekiel sees in a vision a valley filled with dry bones. Possibly he goes in the Spirit to the Valley of Ben Hinnom mentioned by Jeremiah (*Jer. 7 v 32*), where the resisting Israelites were wiped out by the armies of Babylon and the bodies left to rot because there was no-one to bury them. Here God says to him:

'Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off."  
*Ezekiel 37 v 11*

There are times when we, too, feel that our hope is gone. Perhaps when we look back on the vibrant churches of our youth, filled with Christians of all ages, and then see our small, top-heavy congregation of today.

Or when we are haunted by the spectre of irreversible climate change, remembering the vast areas of rainforest destroyed over the last 50 years and the greenhouse gases which our industries have poured into the atmosphere.

If you are feeling today that your hope is gone, take heart from what happens through Ezekiel.

## 2) The power of the prophetic Word

God calls Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones: Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! He speaks God's creative, restorative word, and the bones come together; muscles and flesh grow back over them. He speaks again and God's Spirit brings life to the dead:

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army. *Ezekiel 37 v 10*

God's Word and his Spirit bring new and true life. God's dead people become a living army, a people who in the fullness of time will reoccupy their Promised Land.

Ezekiel reminded his people of God's faithfulness and God's power to bring change and resurrection. He spoke God's truth into the situation they were in. We, too, need to speak God's truth into our situation, trusting that our faithful God will lead us safely through the wilderness, and refusing to say "Our hope is gone". When we feel dejected, we need to remind ourselves of God's promises, which bring hope and life. As Dave Hopwood's poem says:

Those dry bones get everywhere – but so does the breath of God and so does the hopeful life of the Spirit.

The Lord is here. **His Spirit is with us.** He can revive us as he revived his people in exile.

## 3) Speaking truth to temptation

When we looked at Deuteronomy 8 earlier in this series, we saw that the reason God gave to his people for those 40 years of wandering in the desert is:

'to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord' *Deuteronomy 8 v 3b*

On the evening before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for his disciples in these words:

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. *John 17 v 17*

We see Jesus' great regard for the word of God in the way he responds to temptation in the desert at the start of his ministry. It seems that he understands his 40 days in the light of Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, for each time the devil shows him a way of mission which is not God's way, Jesus responds by quoting the truth of the word of God, using scriptures from Deuteronomy which refer to those 40 years.

I wonder, what are your besetting sins? We each have them, but we can resist the temptation to commit them by following Jesus' example in speaking God's word of truth into our everyday situations. We know God's ways of love, justice and righteousness; let us walk in them, for:

the ways of the Lord are right *Hosea 14 v 9*

All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures for ever.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn StF 386 <sup>6</sup> [To join in click here](#)

1. In the beginning was darkness and nothing;  
your Spirit was moving over the deep.  
You spoke a whisper and creation existed,  
birthed by the mighty words that you speak.

Just say the word and my weary soul  
will be renewed.

*Breathe on me O breath of God  
and fill me with life anew.*

*Breathe on me O breath of God  
and set this heart on fire for you.*

2. Bones in a valley were changed into an army,  
raised by your Spirit's powerful touch.  
Here in your presence I'm needing Your  
refreshing;  
Lord, please revive my heart with your love.

Just say the word....

*Breathe on me O breath of God...*

Revival fire fall down like the rain ]  
Revival fire set my soul ablaze ] x 2

Set us ablaze. Set us on fire.

*Breathe on me O breath of God...*

*Vicky Beeching*

### Prayer of Intercession

Where your people have lost hope, **fill them with life anew.**

Lord God, I remember before you the world in which I live. Many nations are suffering because of the Covid pandemic, or the effects of climate change, or ongoing conflicts. I bring these places and their people to you, naming those countries on my heart...

Where your people have lost hope, **fill them with life anew.**

Lord God, I remember before you my local area. Many people are struggling because of the lockdown; some have lost homes or jobs or income; others have lost loved ones, or have to watch them suffer because our health service cannot treat them at the moment. Thank you for the organisations trying to help; I bring them to you, naming them before you...

Where your people have lost hope, **fill them with life anew.**

Lord God, I remember before you the people on my heart, particularly my friends and family. In these difficult times I pray for those who are ill, or who feel lonely and friendless, or who are concerned about their future. Speak to me about how I can make a difference in their lives, as I name those I know who are in need...

Where your people have lost hope, **fill them with life anew.**

Lord God, I remember before you my church. Separated as we are by lockdown, yet in you we are one. Help us to love one another as you have loved us. We look forward to the time when we can once again meet to worship and serve you together.

Where your people have lost hope, **fill them with life anew. Amen.**

### Hymn StF 391 (with extra verse) [To join in click here](#)

1. O breath of life, come sweeping through us,  
revive Your church with life and power.  
O breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,  
And fit your Church to meet this hour.

2. O wind of God, come bend us, break us,  
till humbly we confess our need;  
then in your tenderness remake us,  
revive, restore, for this we plead.

3. O breath of love, come breathe within us,  
renewing thought and will and heart;  
come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,  
revive your Church in every part.

4. Revive us, Lord! Is zeal abating  
while harvest fields are vast and white?  
Revive us, Lord! The world is waiting;  
equip your Church to spread the light.

## **Blessing <sup>1</sup>**

Holy Spirit, breathe through us, so that we might speak out words of light and life where we see only shadows and death. Send us into this world of exile with the promise of a world renewed and the power of our risen saviour.

And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon us and all those we love, now and for ever. **Amen.**

## **Acknowledgements**

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